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BIHAR

**JANUARY
2024**

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Content

● New Tourism Policy	3
● Approval of Infrastructure Projects	3
● Illegal Sand Mining	3
● A Rise in Tiger Numbers in Valmiki Tiger Reserve	4
● Expansion of Litchi Cultivation Across India	6
● Bihar Caste Survey to be Put in Public Domain: SC	7
● Aadhar Seeding for NREGS Card Holders	7
● Procurement of EVs to Boost Bihar's Electric Mobility.....	8
● Rise of Child Marriages.....	8
● Study to Analyse Air Pollution in Bihar	9
● Bihar Laghu Udyami Yojana	11
● Government to Make Bihar Leader in Startup Sector	11
● Late Former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur to be Awarded Bharat Ratna	12

New Tourism Policy

Why in News?

Recently, the **Bihar cabinet approved the Bihar Tourism Policy 2023** to attract more investment in the **tourism sector**.

Key points:

- The policy **aims to develop fundamental infrastructure near tourist destinations** in the state and also includes provisions for stakeholders.
- **The new policy contains several financial incentives for investors. These include:**
 - Capital subsidy of 30% for investments up to Rs 10 crore.
 - 25% for investments up to Rs 50 crore.
 - 25% for investments exceeding Rs 50 crore, with a maximum limit of Rs 25 crore.
 - 100% reimbursement of land conversion fee, stamp duty and registration fee.
 - 80% reimbursement of **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** on commercial operation for up to 5 years.
 - 100% reimbursement of electricity tariff for new tourism units for 5 years.
 - Hoteliers and tour operators will get a 5% reimbursement of the monthly remuneration paid to tourist guides. The maximum monthly limit for this will be Rs 5000 per guide for up to 2 years.
 - incentives for green certification, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) promotions, are also included in the policy.
- 50% of the subsidy will be paid at the commencement of commercial operation, 25% after 2 years, and 25% after 5 years.
- A sum of Rs 62 crore is also sanctioned for the construction of an alternative approach path with sheds and a bus depot near **Vishnupad Temple in Gaya**.

Famous Tourist Places in Bihar

Mahabodhi Temple Complex in Bodhgaya, Vishwa Shanti Stupa in Rajgir, Nalanda, Ancient city of Patliputra, **Valmiki Nagar Tiger Reserve** in the West Champaran, etc.,

Approval of Infrastructure Projects

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Cabinet **approved the infrastructure projects in Bihar and the North-East worth over Rs.5,500 crore**.

- Projects worth Rs.2,486.78 crore for improvement and widening of the 135-km stretch of the **national highway from Khowai to Harina in Tripura** are also **approved** by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).

Note: The CCEA also approved the **Minimum Support Price (MSP)** for copra for 2024.

Key Points

- A **4.56 km-long six-lane bridge** over the Ganga connecting Digha and Sonepur in Bihar was approved by the cabinet.
 - Digha, in Patna district, and Sonepur, in Saran district, are **currently connected by a rail-cum-road bridge** that can be used by light vehicles only.
- According to the Information and Broadcasting Minister, the **new bridge would connect north and south Bihar**, and would allow transport by heavy vehicles.
- The project, which will take 42 months to complete, **would also improve connectivity for sites of Buddhist pilgrimage like Vaishali**.

Illegal Sand Mining

Why in News?

Recently, Bihar police **arrested sand smugglers in a major crackdown against illegal sand mining**.

- This operation, near the **Sone River**, signifies a significant step in the ongoing battle against powerful criminal syndicates involved in illicit sand mining activities.

Key Points

- **Initiatives to Prevent Sand Mining in India** are Mines and Mineral Development and Regulation Act, 1957 (MMDR Act), 2006 Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), Sustainable Sand Management Guidelines (SSMG) 2016 and **Enforcement and Monitoring Guidelines for Sand Mining 2020**.

Note:

- The Sone River, a **perennial river in central India**, is the **Ganges'** 2nd-largest southern tributary.
- Originating near Amarkantak Hill in Chhattisgarh, it flows through Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, forming waterfalls at the Amarkantak plateau.
 - It merges with the Ganges near Patna, Bihar.
- **Tributaries include** Ghaghar, Johilla, Chhoti Mahanadi, Banas, Gopad, Rihand, Kanhar, and North Koel River.
- **Prominent dams include** the Bansagar Dam in Madhya Pradesh and the Rihand Dam near Pipri in Uttar Pradesh.



A Rise in Tiger Numbers in Valmiki Tiger Reserve

Why in News?

Recently, the **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)** had officially announced the increase in **tiger** population in Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR).

- It witnessed the growth in the number of big cats from 31 (2018) to 54 (2023).

- The Bihar government is **waiting to obtain NTCA approval for declaring Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary as the state's second tiger reserve** after VTR.

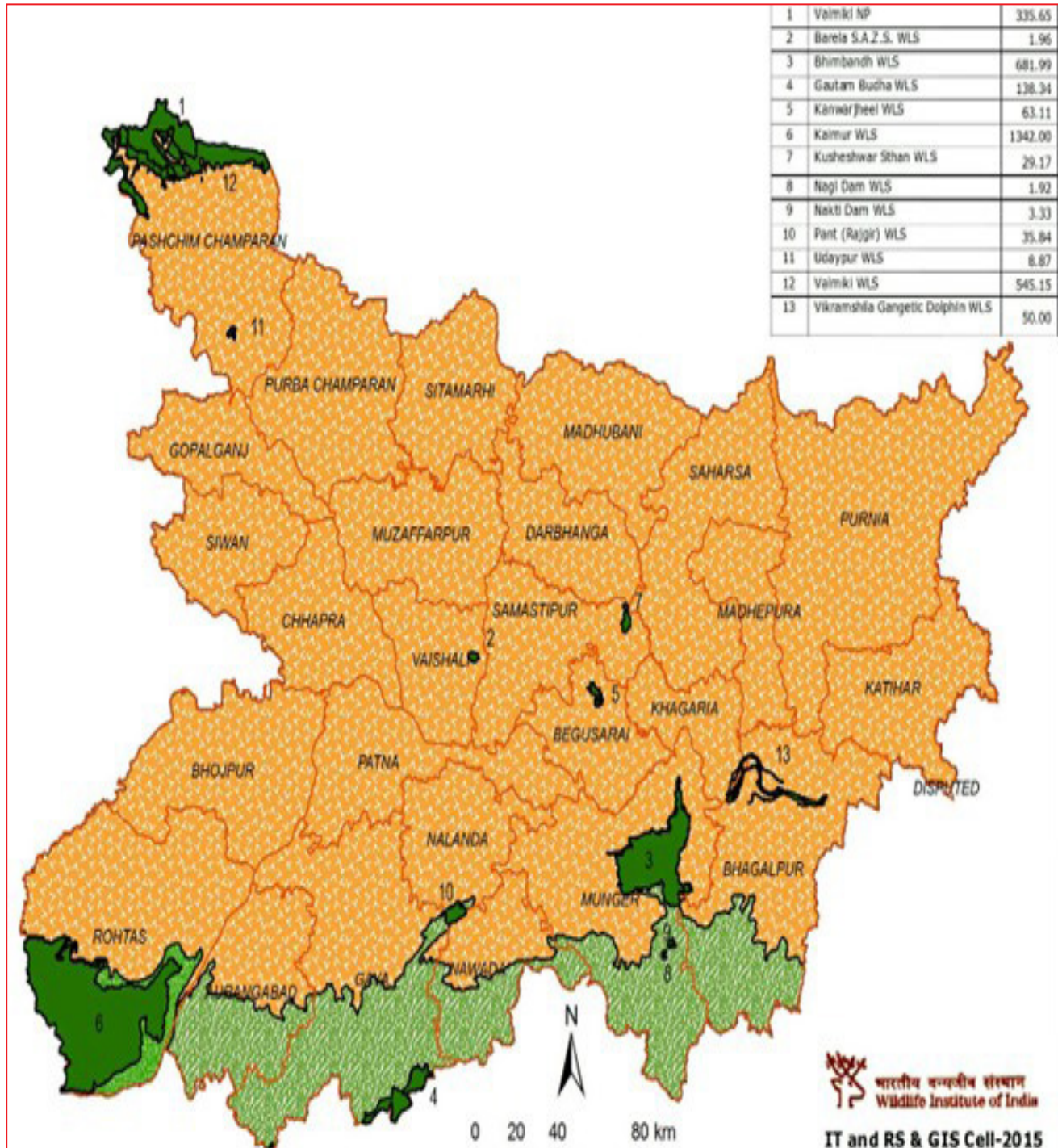
Key Points

- A total **ban on sand and stone mining** inside VTR, and strict restrictions on mining in its eco-sensitive zone, helped increase grassland cover.
- An **increase in grassland cover** thus helps in supporting the prey population, in turn increasing the chances of the carnivores' survival.

Note:



- The VTR is the **only tiger reserve in Bihar**, which forms the easternmost extent of the Himalayan Terai forests in India.
 - The VTR is **located in Bihar's West Champaran district**, bordering Nepal to its north and Uttar Pradesh to its west.
- According to the Forest Survey of India Report 2021, **85.71% of its total area is covered by forest cover.**
- Wild mammals **found in the forests of Valmiki Tiger Reserve include** tiger, sloth bear, leopard, wild dog, bison, wild boar etc.
- **Rivers Gandak, Pandai, Manor, Harha, Masan and Bhapsa** flow through various parts of the reserve.



Note:

Expansion of Litchi Cultivation Across India

Why in News?

The cultivation of **Litchi**, traditionally restricted to **Muzaffarpur, Bihar**, has witnessed a significant expansion across **19 Indian states, highlighting the Horticulture boost in India.**

- This development stems from the efforts of the **National Research Centre on Litchi (NRCL)** based in Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

Key Facts

- **Botanical Classification:** Litchi belongs to the Sapindaceae family and is known for its delicious, juicy, translucent aril or edible flesh.
- **Climatic Requirements:** Litchi thrives in **sub-tropical climates and prefers moist conditions.** It grows best in regions with low elevation, up to an altitude of around 800 meters.



- **Soil Preference:** The ideal soil for litchi cultivation is **deep, well-drained loamy soil** rich in organic matter.
- **Temperature Sensitivity:** Litchi is sensitive to extreme temperatures. It does not tolerate temperatures above 40.5 degrees Celsius in summer or freezing temperatures in winter.
- **Rainfall Impact:** Prolonged rain, especially during flowering, can interfere with pollination and affect the crop adversely.

- **Geographical Cultivation:** In India, the commercial cultivation was traditionally restricted to the north in the foot hills of **Himalayas from Tripura to Jammu & Kashmir** and plains of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
 - But due to increased demand and viability, cultivation has expanded to states like **Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.**
 - Bihar alone accounts for nearly **40% of India's litchi production.** Bihar is followed by West Bengal (12%) and Jharkhand (10%).
- **Global Production:** India ranks as the **second largest producer of litchi globally**, following China. Other significant litchi-producing countries include Thailand, Australia, South Africa, Madagascar, and the United States.

Horticulture

- **About:**
 - Horticulture refers to **the science, art, and practice of cultivating fruits, vegetables, flowers, ornamental plants, and other crops.**
 - It encompasses a broad spectrum of activities **related to plant cultivation, management, propagation, and improvement** for human use and enjoyment.
- **Initiatives for Horticulture:**
 - **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH):**
 - **MIDH** is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables and other areas.
 - Under MIDH, Government of India contributes 60% of the total outlay for developmental programmes in all the states (except North Eastern and Himalayan states where GOI contributes 90%) & 40% is contributed by State governments.
 - **Horticulture Cluster Development Programme:**
 - It is a **central sector programme** aimed at growing and developing identified horticulture clusters to make them globally competitive.
 - Horticulture cluster is a regional/geographical concentration of targeted horticulture crops.

Note:

Bihar Caste Survey to be Put in Public Domain: SC

Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Bihar government to **put the break-up of the caste survey data in the public domain** to enable aggrieved persons to challenge the findings.

- The advocate appearing on behalf of the Bihar government have said that the data, caste wise is already available in the public domain

Key Points

- The panel of justices **declined to provide any assistance to the petitioners who have contested the caste survey** and the verdict of the Patna High Court that supports the Bihar government's decision to carry out such a task.
- The Bihar Caste Survey, 2023 revealed that **Other Backward Classes (OBCs)** and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) **together constitute 63 % of the state's total population.**
 - According to the data released, the **state's total population stood at a little over 13.07 crore**, out of which the **EBCs (36%) were the largest social segment** followed by the OBCs at 27.13%.
- Since the survey data is out, **the authorities have started implementing it in the interim and raised the reservation for SCs, STs, OBCs, EBCs, and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)** to a total of 75% from the existing 50%.

Aadhar Seeding for NREGS Card Holders

Why in News?

By mid-January 2024, Bihar is expected to complete the process of linking **Aadhar** cards of all job card holders under **MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme).**

- It is part of the Centre's directive to states to implement Aadhar-based payment of wages to beneficiaries under the scheme.

Key Points

- The Centre had made **AePS (Aadhar enabled Payment System)** mandatory for all job card holders under **MGNREGS from January 1.**
- It means **payments as wages** to beneficiaries for their work would be made **directly into their bank accounts linked and verified through their Aadhar number** after due mapping by **National Payments Corporation of India (NCPI).**
- **In Bihar, the total number of job card holders under MNREGA is 1.80 crore**, of which **1.52 crore have their bank accounts linked with their Aadhar** (unique identification) numbers.
 - Of these around **96 lakh active workers** (who have been working regularly), around **94 lakh have their bank accounts linked with Aadhar** while **79.63 lakh are eligible for payments under AePS.**
- In the **current fiscal year (2023-24)**, Bihar has **generated 15.64 crore mandays** (a day regarded in terms of the amount of work that can be done by one person within this period) so far **against the sanctioned 17 crore under the scheme**, which is meant to provide at least 100 days of work to unskilled rural workers in a year.
 - A proposal for grant of another **8 crore mandays for work generation in this fiscal would be sent by Bihar to the ministry of rural development.**

Aadhar

- It is a **12-digit individual identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India** on behalf of the Government of India.
 - The number serves as **proof of identity and address, anywhere in India.**
- The Aadhaar number is unique for each individual and will **remain valid for life time.**
 - Establishes identity of individuals on the basis of demographic and biometric information.
- It will **help the residents to avail various services** provided by banking, mobile phone connections and other Government and Non-Government services in due course.

Note:

Procurement of EVs to Boost Bihar's Electric Mobility

Why in News?

Recently, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced the procurement of two electric cars during the Bihar **Electric Vehicle (EV) Conclave and Expo** held in Patna.

- It is a significant move towards promoting sustainable and **eco-friendly transportation** in Bihar.

Key Points

- The event was organised by the Bihar Transport Department in collaboration with World Resources Institute, India, and the Bihar State Pollution Control Board.
- During his visit, the Chief Minister actively engaged with the showcased EVs, seeking detailed information about their features and capabilities.
 - He emphasised the environmental benefits of EVs and highlighted ongoing efforts to develop infrastructure for convenient public charging facilities.
 - He urged the public to explore the advantages of EVs, emphasising their role in environmental conservation.
- Transport Department Minister Sheela Kumari inaugurated the conclave and emphasised the collective efforts required to achieve a pollution-free State.
- According to the Transport Secretary, the share of EVs among total new vehicle registrations was 7% in 2023, exceeding the national average of 6%.
- With Bihar EV Policy offering purchase incentives and exemption in motor vehicle tax and provisions for robust charging infrastructure, the EV penetration in the State is set to meet the target of 15% well within the set timeframe of 2028.
- According to **World Resources Institute (WRI) India**, Digitalisation of the system can hugely improve the transport system efficiency in States.
 - Demand aggregation can bring about 30% reduction in cost and help scale the adoption of e-buses.
 - Open data repositories are critical to improve the transport infrastructure as they can help us improve transport infrastructure planning to meet growing demand.
 - Ease of financing is another critical component that can help States in creating an enabling marketplace for public transportation.

- Sudhendu Jyoti Sinha, Adviser at **NITI Aayog** suggested several measures to promote electric mobility, including implementing aggressive electric mobility initiatives in a few cities and encouraging schools to switch to electric buses initially.

World Resources Institute (WRI)

- WRI was created in 1982 in Washington, D.C. It is a non-profit, science and evidence based institution that carries out rigorous policy research of global environmental and development issues.
- Its mission is to move human society to live in ways that protect Earth's environment and its capacity to provide for the needs and aspirations of current and future generations.

NITI Aayog

- The NITI Aayog serves as the apex public policy think tank of the Government of India.
- The nodal agency tasked with catalyzing economic development, and fostering cooperative federalism.
 - Moving away from bargaining federalism through the involvement of State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.

Rise of Child Marriages

Why in News?

A recent **Lancet** study on **child marriage** in India highlighted an overall decrease in child marriage across the country. However, it emphasized that certain states, specifically Bihar (16.7%), West Bengal (15.2%), Uttar Pradesh (12.5%), and Maharashtra (8.2%), collectively contributed to over half of the total headcount burden of child marriages in girls.

Key Points

- According to the **National Family Health Survey 4 (NFHS 2015-16)**, 39.1% of women within 20-24 years are married before 18 years.
 - This means 2 out of 5 adolescent girls are married off before they complete their higher secondary education.
- As per the **District Level Household Survey (DLHS-4, 2015-16)**, child marriage in the intervention areas of **CRY-supported projects** in Bihar, **Supaul had the highest percentage of child marriage, followed by Begusarai, Jamui, Samastipur and Gaya districts.**

Note:

- As the latest **Census (2011)** data reveals, there are over **13 million adolescent girls** who are **married between 10 to 19 years of age**.
 - A startling **3.8 million adolescent girls in India have children**, of which **1.4 million had two or more children**, even before completing adolescence.
 - A brief analysis of their education profile reveals that **39% of girls** who were **illiterate had begun child bearing**, compared to **26% who were literate**, proving that even a little education goes a long way in empowering girls.
- To address the issue of **child marriage** on a sustainable basis, the need of the hour is to **ensure inter-departmental convergence** where **schools, Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and panchayati-raj institutions** need to **play a pivotal role**.
- Following the mandate of Integrated **Child Protection Scheme**, formation and **strengthening of Child Protection Committees at the Gram Panchayat and block level** needs immediate attention, and these units would have to be accountable to address issues related to child marriage.

NFHS-4

- In addition to the 29 states, **NFHS-4 included all six union territories for the first time and provided estimates of most indicators at the district level** for all 640 districts in the country as per the 2011 census.
- The **survey covered a range of health-related issues**, including fertility, infant and child mortality, maternal and child health, perinatal mortality, adolescent reproductive health, high-risk sexual behaviour, safe injections, **tuberculosis**, and **malaria, non-communicable diseases, domestic violence, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)** knowledge, and attitudes toward people living with HIV.

Study to Analyse Air Pollution in Bihar

Why in News?

Recently, the Bihar government has decided to conduct a **real-time apportionment study** in **Muzaffarpur and Gaya** to identify sources of **air pollution**.

- The decision was taken because **Muzaffarpur, Gaya and the state capital Patna** are among the **122 non-attainment cities** in terms of air pollution trends.

Key Points

- The study will be conducted by the **Indian Institute of Technology (Delhi and Patna)** along with the **Bihar State Pollution Control Board**.
 - The study will identify the **“seasonal mass concentration level of PM2.5 and PM10 in ambient air”** of the extended urban areas of both cities.
 - PM 2.5 and PM 10 are **minute particles** present in the air, and exposure to these is harmful to health.
- **Real-time source apportionment studies** help identify factors, such as **vehicles, dust, biomass burning, and emissions from industries**, responsible for an increase in air pollution in an area
- **The Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development, Banaras Hindu University (BHU)** is already conducting the study in the Bihar capital and it is expected to be completed by September 2024.
- **The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** launched the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**, which proposed strategies to reduce air pollution.
 - **The NCAP identified 122 non-attainment cities** that violate the **National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)**.
- Apart from conducting **emission inventory, carrying capacity and source apportionment of particulate matter**, experts will also collect data on the contribution of **river bed material (soil) and source of road dust**.
- **Covering of construction materials** during transportation, **mandatory green shields** for building construction, **development of green belts**, promotion of **e-vehicles** and use of **environment-friendly fuel**, stringent checking of **vehicle emission** and use of **smog guns** are some of the steps that are being taken by the authorities concerned in the state.
- The **Indo-Gangetic plain** faces massive **aerosol loading**, which is also one of the reasons for air pollution in several cities.
 - **Aerosol is defined as a suspension system of solid or liquid particles** in a gas.

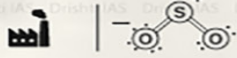
National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)

- NAAQS are the standards for ambient air quality with reference to various identified pollutants notified by the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**.
 - **List of pollutants under NAAQS:** PM10, PM2.5, SO2, NO2, CO, NH3, Ozone, Lead, Benzene, Benzo-Pyrene, Arsenic and Nickel.

Note:

Air Pollutants

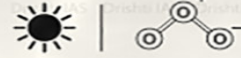
Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂)



It comes from the consumption of fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas). Reacts with water to form acid rain.

Impact: Causes respiratory problems.

Ozone (O₃)



Secondary pollutant formed from other pollutants (NO_x and VOC) under the action of the sun.

Impact: Irritation of the eye and respiratory mucous membranes, asthma attacks.

Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)



Emissions from road transport, industry and energy production sectors. Contributes to Ozone and PM formation.

Impact: Chronic lung disease.

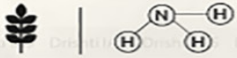
Carbon Monoxide (CO)



It is a product of the incomplete combustion of carbon-containing compounds.

Impact: Fatigue, confusion, and dizziness due to inadequate oxygen delivery to the brain.

Ammonia (NH₃)



Produced by the metabolism of amino acids and other compounds which contain nitrogen.

Impact: Immediate burning of the eyes, nose, throat and respiratory tract and can result in blindness, lung damage.

Lead (Pb)



Released as a waste product from extraction of metals such as silver, platinum, and iron from their respective ores.

Impact: Anemia, weakness, and kidney and brain damage.

Particulate Matter (PM)



PM10: Inhalable particles, with diameters that are generally 10 micrometers and smaller.

PM2.5: Fine inhalable particles, with diameters that are generally 2.5 micrometers and smaller.

Source: Emitted from construction sites, unpaved roads, fields, fires.

Impact: Irregular heartbeat, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function.

Note: These major air pollutants are included in the Air quality index for which short-term National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed.



Note:

Bihar Laghu Udyami Yojana

Why in News?

Recently, the Bihar government has approved a scheme to provide financial assistance of ₹2 lakh each to over 9.4 million poor families to create self-employment opportunities.

Key Points

- The approval to the “Bihar Laghu Udyami Yojana” (Bihar small entrepreneur scheme) was among the **18 proposals of different departments approved during the cabinet meeting** chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.
 - The scheme, which will continue for **five years**, aims to provide **job opportunities to over 9.4 million poor families**, whose **monthly income is less than ₹6,000 a month**.
 - The **state industries department will implement the scheme**, and **beneficiaries will be selected through a computerised randomisation process**.
- **At least one member** of the poor families will be provided grant up to ₹2 lakh in three installments to set up and run small industrial or processing units, such as handicraft, textile, saloon, eateries, among 63 types of units.
- The cabinet approved an **estimated annual expenditure of ₹9.79 crore**:
 - To expand the ambit of financial aid being provided to students from **Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) families preparing for civil services (mains) exams**.
 - EBC students **preparing for other tests** such as recruitment and competitive exams among others, will also **get a one-time financial grant ranging from ₹75,000 to ₹30,000**.

Note:

- Recently, the Bihar government released the **socio-economic data in the state assembly**, after releasing **the caste survey report**.
 - The data showed **9,433,312 families (or 34.13%) of the total 27,628,995 families in the state are economically poor**.
 - Of the poor families, **3.31 million families belong to the EBCs**, **2.47 million from Other Backward Classes (OBCs)**, **2.34 million from the Scheduled Castes (SCs)**, **1.08 million from the general category** and **201,000 families from Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.

Government to Make Bihar Leader in Startup Sector

Why in News?

According to the State industry minister Samir Kumar Mahaseth, the government was working on a mission to make Bihar a leader in the field of **startups**.

Key Points

- According to the minister at the Bihar Startup Awards 2024 event at Adhiveshan Bhawan on the occasion of **National Startup Day (16th January)**, Bihar will grow as its startup sector grows.
- At the event awards were presented to several startups active in the state including:
 - **Medivisor Pvt Ltd** received the **Best Startup of the Year award**, **Ved Prabha Aerospace Pvt Ltd** emerged **first runner-up**, and **Biro Power Pvt Ltd** **second runner-up in this category**.
- Awards were also given in various categories, including **women’s leadership, agriculture, information technology, e-commerce, electric vehicles** and **Educational technology**.
 - Under the **Bihar Startup Policy** to the entrepreneurs:
 - **Interest-free seed funding of up to Rs 10 lakh** is provided to budding entrepreneurs **for a period of ten years**.
 - A **5% higher amount** is allocated as **seed funding** to startups initiated by **women**, and **15% more** for startups led by **scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and differently-abled individuals**.
 - A grant of up to **Rs 3 lakh** is given to **individuals participating in acceleration programs**.
 - If **investments** are received from **registered entities and angel investors**, **matching loans of up to Rs 50 lakh** are also provided.

National Startup Day

- It is **observed annually on 16th January** to appreciate and promote the **Indian Startup Ecosystem**.
- **Startup India initiative** was launched on 16th January, 2016, with a vision to **cultivate innovation, support startups, and stimulate investments**.
- It encompasses **initiatives like the Seed Fund scheme and Credit Guarantee Scheme**, further aiding startups.

Note:

- India has **emerged as the 3rd largest ecosystem for startups globally as of 31st May 2023.**
 - India **ranks 2nd in innovation quality** with top positions in the quality of scientific publications and the quality of its universities among middle-income economies.

Late Former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur to be Awarded Bharat Ratna

Why in News?

Late former Bihar **Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur** will be **posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna**, India's highest civilian honour.

Key Points

- This prestigious recognition is a testament to **Karpoori Thakur's enduring efforts** as a champion for the **marginalised and a loyal, reliable, and hard-working supporter of equality and empowerment.**
- His **unwavering commitment to uplift the downtrodden and visionary leadership** have left an indelible mark on India's socio-political fabric.
 - This award not only **honours his remarkable contributions** but **also inspires the society to continue his mission of creating a more just and equitable society.**

Karpoori Thakur

- He **served as the Chief Minister of Bihar twice**, and was known for championing the cause of the backward classes.
- His tenure as Chief Minister was marked by various pro-poor initiatives, including the **implementation of land reforms and policies aimed at empowering the underprivileged.**
- **Popularly known as Jan Nayak (people's hero)**, he was widely respected for his integrity and dedication to the welfare of the common people.

- He was **associated with multiple political parties** throughout his career.
- He began his political journey with the Praja Socialist Party and later aligned himself with the Janata Party during his first term as the chief minister of Bihar from 1977 to 1979. Subsequently, he became affiliated with the Janata Dal.
- He **passed away in February 1988.**



Bharat Ratna

- It is the **highest civilian award of the country.** It is awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order **in any field of human endeavour.**
- It is treated on a different footing from Padma Award. The **recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister to the President of India.**
- The number of Bharat Ratna Awards is **restricted to a maximum of three in a particular year.**



Note:

